
CHILD-ONLY TANF/KINSHIP CARE

TARGET POPULATION

Neglected or abused children in the care of non-needy relatives, most of whom have taken over primary care of the children without the involvement of the child welfare system.

GOALS

- Enhance the well-being of children in kinship care.
- Promote the stability of kinship care families.
- Ensure the best permanency option for children placed with relatives by the child welfare system.

CHALLENGE

A large majority of kinship caregivers have intervened to care for neglected or abused relative children without the neglect or abuse having come to the attention of the child welfare system. These caregivers are often wary of state intervention and often prefer the minimally intrusive TANF grant to the more intrusive foster care licensing process. At the same time, many of these caregivers are living on low to moderate fixed incomes and face multiple health problems of their own -- sometimes creating fragile caregiving situations.

WHAT WE DO IN WASHINGTON STATE

- We provide child-only TANF grants and Medicaid for children in the care of relatives. Only the income and resources of the child are used in determining eligibility and the relative need only prove they are related to the child and are their primary caregiver. Relative caregivers are not subject to criminal background checks, while non-relative caregivers receiving child-only TANF grants are subject to background checks. Subsidized child care through the Working Connections Child Care program is available if at least one relative caregiver is employed outside the home. Since they are not receiving cash assistance for themselves, relative caregivers are not subject to WorkFirst requirements, nor do they benefit from WorkFirst case management services. In July 2010, there were 9,336 child-only/kinship care cases, involving over 13,000 children.
- Additional financial support for relative caregivers is provided through the Kinship Caregiver Support Program (KCSP) managed by the DSHS Aging and Disability Services Administration (ADSA). KCSP funds, budgeted at \$2 million for the biennium, are distributed statewide through the Area Agencies on Aging and their community partners to help caregivers

purchase basic necessities for the children in their care, including furniture, clothing, and school supplies.

- The Children's Administration prioritizes the placement of children with relatives and many of these relatives receive child-only TANF grants. The Children's Administration approves its relative placements after a screening process that includes background checks and home visits. Once approved, Children's supports these placements with additional financial resources through its own support services fund, and additional services such as child care and respite care.
- Under a special arrangement between the DSHS Economic Services Administration (ESA, which administers the TANF grant) and Children's Administration (which intervenes in cases of abuse or neglect), when Children's places a child with a relative who receives a child-only TANF grant, ESA can continue the original family TANF grant to the parent for up to 180 days, as long as the parent is making progress toward reunification.
- Washington State has a network of Kinship Navigators who serve as a central point of contact for caregivers seeking to access benefits and services. The navigators are supported by a combination of state and federal grant funds. ADSA manages the Kinship Navigator program through the Area Agencies on Aging, with 30 counties covered by the service. The state's Kinship Navigator Program was selected to be included in the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse as a reference for other states interested in the model.
- Washington State also has an informal network of about 40 relative caregiver support groups. Seven of the state's 13 Area Agencies on Aging sponsor support groups with funds from the National Family Caregiver Support Program. ADSA shares resource information with support group leaders and sponsors training workshops.
- ADSA manages the DSHS Kinship Care website, providing information on a variety of public and private resources and services and a range of topics helpful to caregivers: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare>. Other media and print resources are also available to caregiver relatives, advocates, and state agency staff on topics such as education advocacy, health care consent, child support, legal options, mediation, incarcerated parents, and the child welfare system.
- Children's Administration chairs a legislatively-mandated Statewide Kinship Care Oversight Committee, which promotes the needs of kinship caregivers and the children in their care and makes recommendations for program and policy improvements in annual reports to the State Legislature. By law, the Committee must consist of at least 30 percent caregivers. The mandate for the Oversight Committee expires in June 2011.
- ESA chairs an internal DSHS Kinship Care Workgroup that is currently developing a plan for improving services to kinship families during the remainder of the 2010-2011 biennium and beyond.

PROMISING PRACTICES

High-performing programs for kinship families commonly include some or all of these features:

- Close coordination or integration of different systems serving these families, including TANF, child welfare, and aging agencies, as well as community-based organizations.
- Options for caregivers that address the financial needs of relative caregivers, preserving their ability to provide a healthy and stable environment for the children in their care.
- Directing resources to caregivers and children outside the formal child welfare system to prevent these children from entering that system.
- Arrangements to help caregivers navigate the complex human services system.

Ideally, the effectiveness of a “best” practice should be supported by some objective evaluation data or at least the program should be nationally recognized as a model for other programs. Other important considerations are the size or scale of the program, its cost, and whether it currently or could potentially serve TANF clients. “Promising” practices may be programs that do not meet these standards but are still innovative and contain elements that could be of interest in Washington’s TANF redesign effort. \

Particularly with regard to kinship care, practices that target caregivers not receiving child-only TANF should be considered promising if they serve to support the ability of these caregivers to raise relative children without ongoing state financial assistance.

Although not a “best” or “promising” practice per se, the Washington State Early Learning Plan released on September 1, 2010 provides guidelines for any state agency whose programs or policies impact children aged birth through third grade, and their families. The goals of this plan, which are related to school readiness, are as relevant to children being raised by relatives as to children being raised by their biological parents. For caregivers, these goals range from “a comprehensive, culturally and language-appropriate information and referral system about all aspects of child health, development and early learning”, to the availability of “culturally appropriate services and supports.”

The table below lists various innovative programs and identifies which key features they exhibit.

	State	Program Titles/Brief Descriptions	Service Coordination	Financial options	Informal care	Navigation
PROMISING PRACTICES						
1.	WA State DSHS, Children’s Administration	Family Team Decision Making (FTDM)	X			

	State	Program Titles/Brief Descriptions	Service Coordination	Financial options	Informal care	Navigation
2.	El Paso County, Colorado	Integrated Services Model	X			
3.	Tennessee	Relative Caregiver Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families First Kinship Payment Overview • FAST (assessment tool) 	X		X	X
4.	Tennessee	Families First Kinship Care Pilot <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families First Kinship Payment Overview • Pilot project assessment tool 		X		
5.	Georgia	Kinship Care Navigator Program		X	X	X
6.	Georgia	Kinship Care TANF Program		X	X	
7.	South Carolina	GrandFamily Resource Centers			X	X
8.	Kansas	Grandparents as Caregivers Program		X	X	

LESSONS LEARNED

- The traditional Title IV-A (TANF) and Title IV-E (foster care) silos may pose serious barriers to effectively and efficiently serving this population.
- Serving kinship families outside the formal child welfare system may require a delicate balance between support and intrusion.
- Upfront investments in kinship families may not show up as savings until long after the investment is made.

REFERENCES

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